2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

PREFACE

THIS book is the fruits of field work from September 1946 to September 1947, and from September 1948 to June 1949, as a Research Officer of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, among the Yao of Southern Nyasaland. Between June and September 1949 I was employed by the Nyasaland Government on a survey of the Domasi District where a Development Scheme was to be inaugurated. The detailed results of the Domasi survey have already been published separately,[1] and the general results have been incorporated here by permission of the Nyasaland Government.

By the very nature of his work a sociologist must depend heavily on others for help. As with all sociologists my greatest indebtedness is to the people amongst whom I worked. Here I must mention in particular Chiefs Kawinga and Chiwalo, and Village Headmen Cigwaja and Kapaloma, whose hospitality in one way and another helped me appreciably. I also thank Rajabu Kumpulula, who was my clerk and main informant during the second field trip.

I am grateful to the Nyasaland Government for assistance in many ways, and to several officers of the Administration for their kindness and hospitality to me. In particular, Mr. E. C. Barnes, then Provincial Commissioner in Blantyre, encouraged me by his interest in my research. Mr. Martin Lewis and Mr. R. P. Errington, successive District Commissioners at Zomba, by their sympathetic understanding of the rôle of an anthropologist, and their hospitality in Zomba and Blantyre, did much to make field work less of a burden than it might have been. The hospitality of Mr. Richard Leach and Mr. H. Gardner, then of the Agricultural Department, and of Mr. E. Hemmings of the Native Tobacco Board, also eased the discomforts of field life.

To my teachers and colleagues I owe a special word of thanks. I would like to acknowledge here my debt to two of my teachers at the Natal University College who, during my undergraduate

[1] 'An Outline of the Social Structure of Malemia Area', *The Nyasaland Journal*, iv, 2 (July 1951), 15–48.

3:Stanaus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

the red beads, he is jeered at and laughed to scorn. In this case, the white beads are held to indicate semen, the red beads menstrual blood.

Lítiso: This ceremony is enacted at the time when a young married woman quickens with her first child. *Lítiso* (*lu-tiso*, to plait) refers to the plaited cord put round the woman's neck. The woman and her husband both are present, and in addition, only women, possibly with their babies.

For the man, *Lítiso* is looked upon as the third or completing ceremony of his *Unyago*. He must have been to *Lupenda* and *Chipute*, otherwise he cannot be admitted to *Lítiso*. If, however, the husband is not eligible, some other man who has completed his *Unyago*, is married, and has children, may act as proxy to a woman at *Lítiso*.

In every district there is generally some woman who arranges and conducts the ceremony. She is called *nakenge;* naturally, no European has been present at *Lítiso* but my information was gained from Kuliati, a woman who for years acted as *nakenge* in the villages round Malenya's kraal, and Chilundana, her old mother who had acted in the same capacity before her and who had come from the old Machinga country where her mother in turn had been a well-known *nakenge*.

When a woman quickens with child for the first time, her women-folk visit the local *nakenge*, saying, "We are going to shave so and so (naming the woman) and to get bananas. Tomorrow, we start pounding flour. In three days we shall be ready, and you will come over to arrange things." At the appointed time, the *nakenge* having partaken of food early because she will not eat for the rest of the day, goes out of the village to some spot a half-mile away in the bush and there sees that all preparations are made and sufficient food collected. The food is supplied by the mothers of the man and woman, and consists essentially of beans (*njoma* and *nguvde*), porridge, sugar-cane, and bananas, but no beer.

All being ready, a procession in single file leaves the village for the appointed place, the woman's sponsor leading, the woman followed by the husband and his sponsor (a woman), and the married women assembled from nearby villages. The sponsor is known as *nkumwai* or *nkombwe*. Neither *nkumwai* nor *nakenge* may have sexual relations with their husbands till after the birth of the child. The woman wears bark-cloth stained black, but may wear blue cloth on returning to the village, while her husband is decked out in his finest cloths and ornaments. They have partaken of food early in the day as they fast until the next day.

Arrived at the place, the man and woman take up their positions on mats separated from each other by some twenty or thirty paces, each with his *nkumwai*. The man's *nkumwai* sits on the same mat with him and never leaves him throughout the ceremony. The woman preserves a dignified quiet but the man is expected to make the most of himself sitting with hands on hips, and displaying his fine clothes worn after the fashion of a chief.

While all the assembled crowd of women sit round in a semi-circle, the *nakenge* commences the proceedings, singing a number of songs to the woman and the man in turn,